

June 23, 1992

Questions for Witnesses at the START Hearings

1. On mutual ceilings agreed at the recent Summit:

--Why was President Yeltsin's publicly-proposed mutual ceiling of 2500 or 2000 strategic warheads rejected, in favor of higher figures?

--Why is it not--should it not be--of the highest priority in such negotiations to commit the present Russian leadership, and its successors (who may prove to be less friendly and cooperative), to disable and dismantle the Russian nuclear arsenal just as far and as fast as they will go?

In a country that remains unstable and desperate for hard currency, why leave thousands of warheads that could have been dismantled and placed under international safeguards by agreement right now in hands that might, some time in the future, sell them or trade them, lose control of them, or use them in internal or regional conflicts?

--What US interests are served by leaving President Yeltsin's successors at the end of the century with 4700 warheads--or 3500, or 3000--instead of 2500 or 2000, or less?

Why did the US not respond to President Yeltsin's proposal by proposing a still lower rather than maintaining a higher proposed ceiling?

What US interests would be harmed by US acceptance of a mutual ceiling of 2500, or lower, applying to its own forces?

--[If the answer is that levels of 2500, 2000 cannot be achieved within some given period because of technical or financial constraints on the rate of Russian dismantlement]

Could not strategic weapons be almost immediately disabled, at modest cost, prior to their subsequent dismantlement?

Are not US interests and world security better served by Russian commitment to a lower mutual ceiling, along with immediate disabling of weapons to be dismantled, quite apart from practical considerations on the speed of dismantlement?

In any case, could not the period within which the dismantlement is to take place be extended, if necessary? (The Summit agreement, for example, mentions a target date of 2003).

Still better, could not financial help and technical help speed the process of dismantlement?

Would not such help--which need not come only or even mainly from the US--be well worthwhile, for world security?

Would it not be appropriate for the US component of such help to come from the current defense budget?

--[If the answer is that a ceiling of 2500 or 2000 warheads, or lower, does not permit a sufficiently "robust" or flexible nuclear US deterrent force]

Exactly what foreseeable US purposes, under what circumstances, would require possession of more than 2000, or for that matter, more than 1000 nuclear weapons?

Under foreseeable circumstances, how could considerations of survivability or penetration--assuming maintenance of an ABM Treaty--call for numbers larger than such ceilings, which are themselves very high?

What would be the targets for an additional thousand or two thousand warheads (over a mutual ceiling of 2000 or 1000)?

If the adversary were a successor state to the Soviet Union deploying a comparable number of warheads, how could a higher mutual level either heighten or lessen the certainty of mutual annihilation?

If the adversary were some other state, what would be the potential targets for numbers of warheads of anything like this order, or the potential interest of the US in posing threats of this magnitude?

What operational considerations, either of survivability or flexibility, could require or justify a ~~higher~~ mutual force size greater than 2000, or even considerably lower?

If a "triad" is still considered essential under foreseeable conditions, could it not easily be maintained at these lower levels? If not, why not?

In particular, if it is reasonable to operate a Trident II programmed force of 18 subs at the reduced loading of 1728 RVs (24 tubes per sub, 4 instead of 8 warheads per missile), why is it not possible to operate an 18-sub force at the reduced loading of 1152 warheads (16 tubes per sub, 4 warheads per missile)?

On the other hand, why exactly is it still necessary, or even desirable, to plan on operating 18 Trident II subs, a force programmed (and paid for) under entirely different conditions?

Why, under current conditions, is it worth producing and paying for a force of 432 Trident ~~II~~ missiles, or even--under lower mutual ceilings--as many as 288?

Various accounts of the negotiations underway since January have indicated Russian readiness to give up MIRVd land-based missiles, much earlier in the talks, if the US had comparable disarmed 2/3 of its Trident II SLBM warheads: rather than the 1/3 the US was reportedly offering (or the 1/2 to which it finally agreed). Are these reports accurate?

What US interest was possibly served--under current conditions--by maintaining the option to operate an SLBM force 2/3 of the size of the originally programmed force, or even 1/2, rather than 1/3, which corresponds to 1152 warheads?

Granting the desirability of eliminating Soviet land-based MIRVs, could it have been worth risking an agreement in order to maintain the higher level? Indeed, what US interest is served by operating at the higher level rather than at a level of 1152 SLBM warheads?

Does it serve the US interests of opposing proliferation to be signalling to states we are trying to discourage from deploying a single nuclear warhead that--after the ending of the Cold War--the US cannot meet its own security needs or its sense of its responsibilities with less than several thousand nuclear warheads?

2. In view of the US interest in opposing the testing of a single nuclear weapon by any state that has not already done so, why has the US so far refused to join the moratorium on testing now maintained by the Russians and the French? Would not a suspension of testing by the US--and the UK, at US underground sites--almost surely lead to a Chinese agreement to suspend testing as well?

How can the US justify plans for indefinitely continued testing--even at reduced rates--in view of its interest in nonproliferation (and its treaty commitments), and in the face of expert testimony (e.g. by Dr. Ray Kidder) that no such testing is needed for reliability and that at most a few tests could be justified for safety improvements?

3. Why has not the Russian proposal for a verifiable cutoff of production of fissionable material for weapons been accepted?

Is this not strongly desirable in interest of nonproliferation, both as a precursor to a global ban and as a restraint on the potential diversion of Russian production--which, in contrast to US plans, is still continuing?

4. With the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact threat, and the need to discourage potential nuclear states from acquiring a nuclear arsenal to make first-use threats, why has not the US and its allies joined the Commonwealth of Independent States in renouncing first-use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances, i.e., in accepting a no-first-use commitment?

Is not US insistence on retaining a first-use option and implicit threat an encouragement and legitimation of such threats --and an arsenal supporting them--by states like Pakistan, facing regional rivals with superior conventional forces?

With the ending of the Cold War, does it not serve US and worldwide security interests to delegitimize first-use threats of the sort that NATO felt justified and compelled to make in the past, facing the then-Warsaw Pact forces?

5. Analysts from the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Federation of American Scientists (Thomas Cochran, Christopher Paine, Frank von Hippel) have reported from contacts with Russian officials that Russia will accept bilateral verification and safeguards on the handling of weapons to be dismantled beyond START-II agreed levels and on the safeguarded control of fissionable material from all weapons to be dismantled, provided that such inspection is reciprocal, applying as well to the US; but that the US has so far been unwilling to discuss or accept such reciprocal inspection. Are these reports accurate?

Is it not of the highest priority to achieve inspection and safeguarding of Russian disabling, transport, storage and dismantlement of weapons to be dismantled just as soon as possible?

Should this interest--in addition to motivating technical and financial assistance to the inspection process by the US and others--not override any US reluctance to see such monitoring reciprocated on the US side?